



A STUDY ON THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE PATTERNS ON ANXIETY LEVELS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

College students' everyday lives now revolve on social media, which has a significant impact on their relationships and general mental health. Despite its many advantages, there is rising worry about the relationship between specific social media usage patterns and higher anxiety levels in this population, particularly when consumption is excessive or problematic.

By carefully examining the relationship between certain social media usage patterns—differentiating between passive consumption and active participation—and anxiety levels among college students between the ages of 18 and 25, this quantitative study directly addresses these issues. In order to better understand this complex connection between them, the study also looks at important psychological factors that have related effects, such as social comparison, perceived stress, sleep quality, and FOMO. By analyzing various sources, the study intends to give an in-depth understanding of how social media affects the mental health of young adults, providing insightful information for future support and intervention strategies.

KEYWORDS: Social Media Usage, Anxiety, College Students, Passive and Active Use, FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), Social Comparison

INTRODUCTION

College students, ages 18 to 25, rely heavily on social media sites like Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok to shape their communication and self-image. Despite their many advantages, excessive or problematic use has sparked worries about anxiety levels in this age group increasing.

Research has connected anxiety to behaviors including social comparison, idle browsing, and FOMO (fear of missing out). Active use might result in demand for approval, whilst passive use frequently causes feelings of inadequacy. These effects are further influenced by variables such as emotional resilience, stress, and sleep quality.

This study investigates the relationship between college students' anxiety and their active versus passive social media usage behaviors. With the goal of assisting future mental health interventions, it also looks at psychological aspects like social comparison and FOMO.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Exploring the Impact of Social Media on Anxiety Among University Students in the United Kingdom” – Anto et al. (2023)

Anto et al. carried out a qualitative investigation into how social media affects anxiety in UK college students. According to their research, social media had two effects: it increased anxiety because of procrastination, FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), and continual social comparison, but it also helped people feel less alone and supported emotionally.

Students expressed anxiety of being excluded from social circles and felt overburdened by the effort to maintain a carefully manicured online persona. The study highlights the psychological cost of continuous connectedness and the intricate relationship between digital involvement and emotional well-being. Your research is directly supported by these findings, particularly when it comes to analyzing psychological stressors associated with passive versus active use.

2. Higher Emotional Investment in Social Media Is Related to Anxiety and Depression in University Students – Alsunni & Latif (2021)

Alsunni and Latif investigated the impact of university students' emotional attachment to social media on their mental health. High emotional engagement in social media platforms was found to be strongly positively correlated with higher levels of anxiety and depression. It's interesting to note that students' emotional engagement was more important than their amount of time spent on social media. This implies that anxiety levels are influenced by the quality and emotional intensity of involvement rather than the frequency of use. The study supports the notion that internal psychological motivations and emotional patterns are crucial in comprehending anxiety in social media environments, which is in line with your work.

3. Social Comparison and State-Trait Dynamics: Viewing Image-Conscious Instagram Accounts Affects College Students' Mood and Anxiety – Kohler, Turner &

Webster (2021)

Through social comparison mechanisms, this study examined the effects of reading image-conscious Instagram profiles on the mood and anxiety of college students. Particularly for those with a strong propensity for upward comparison, participants exposed to idealised, appearance-focused content reported higher levels of anxiety, self-criticism, and decreased self-esteem. The study made clear that the emotional effects of social media use are influenced by both trait-based vulnerabilities (such as persistent comparing habits) and state-based mood swings. These findings are important for your research because they support the link between increased anxiety and passively consuming carefully chosen content. The study's psychological lens, which looks at things like digital identity, self-worth, and FOMO, is supported by the paper.

4. Social Network Addiction and Its Impact on Anxiety Level Among University Students – Lozano Blasco et al. (2020)

Lozano Blasco and associates looked into the relationship between university students' anxiety levels and social media addiction. According to their research, pupils who engaged in compulsive behaviors—like checking updates constantly or making extensive comparisons—reported noticeably more anxiety symptoms. The scientists stressed that anxiety was more accurately predicted by emotional and psychological dependency than by mere misuse. Due to their developmental stage and greater desire for peer approval, younger students—especially those attending college for the first time—were more susceptible. This reinforces the notion that anxiety is firmly anchored in students' usage of social media, not merely how frequently they use it, and is consistent with your study's focus on the emotional consequences of passive involvement.

Objectives of the Paper:

- To examine how social media usage patterns lead to anxiety in college - going young adults.
- To analyze what are the passive social media patterns that lead to anxiety.
- To assess what are the active social media patterns that lead to anxiety.

METHODOLOGY:

In order to investigate the association between social media usage patterns and anxiety levels among college students between the ages of 18 and 25, the current study used a quantitative research methodology. To guarantee that every participant had an equal and impartial chance of being chosen, a straightforward random sampling technique** was employed. 123 pupils made up the final sample, falling within the desired range of 100–150 responders. A systematic questionnaire was used to gather data, which included demographic information, the frequency and duration of social media use, and psychological markers such self-reported anxiety, sleep quality, emotional tiredness, and FOMO. Additionally, the survey distinguished between active and passive social media usage behaviors. The analysis

aimed to explore how specific usage behaviors—especially passive engagement and excessive exposure to content—were associated with anxiety symptoms in students, offering insights into the psychological effects of digital media engagement in academic environments.

How do you primarily interact with social media?
123 responses

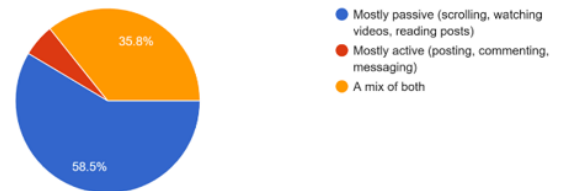


Fig.1. Distribution of Social Media Interaction Patterns Among College Students

The majority of respondents (58.5%) use social media passively, such as by browsing or viewing content without engaging, according to this graphic. Just 5.7% actively participate, whereas 35.8% combine the two. By demonstrating that passive usage patterns predominate among college students, which the study then connects to increased anxiety symptoms including social comparison, FOMO, and mental tiredness, this directly supports Objectives 2 and 3.

I feel anxious when I cannot check social media for a long time.
123 responses

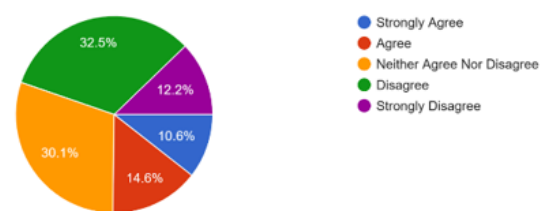


Fig.2. Anxiety Experienced by Students When Unable to Access Social Media

This graph emphasizes how emotionally dependent people are on social networking. Approximately 25.2% of students (strongly agree + agree) said they get nervous when they can't access it. Even though not all students are aware of it consciously, this supports Objective 1 by showing that usage frequency and compulsive behavior are linked to anxiety levels. It implies that a sizable percentage of consumers may experience symptoms similar to withdrawal.

Which aspects of social media use tend to increase your anxiety the most?
123 responses



Fig.3. Perceived Sources of Anxiety Triggered by Social Media Use

According to this graph, 34.1% of students said that the main anxiety-inducing feature of using social media was information overload. Because passive users are more likely to consume huge amounts of content without filtering, this conclusion supports Objective 1 and indirectly connects to Objectives 2 and 3. It draws attention to the mental strain and emotional exhaustion that uncontrolled scrolling can bring on, which heightens anxiety.

Interpretation

The study's findings clearly show a connection between college students' anxiety and their social media usage habits. The majority of respondents predominantly reported passive involvement, which was linked to poor sleep quality, low self-esteem, and feelings of mental tiredness. Digital dependency was seen in the anxiety that about 25.2% of individuals felt when they couldn't access social media. Remarkably, 34.1% of respondents said that information overload was the main cause of their anxiety, followed by exposure to bad content and idealized lifestyles. These results, which demonstrate that frequent checking, emotional triggers, and passive use have a substantial impact on students' mental health, are consistent with the goals of the study.

FINDINGS

- 58.5% of respondents primarily engage in passive social media use (scrolling/viewing without interaction).
- Most students spend 3–4 hours daily on social media and check it more than 10 times a day.
- 25.2% of students feel anxious when they can't access social media for extended periods.
- 34.1% reported that excessive content consumption increases their anxiety.
- Many students (35%) acknowledged that seeing idealized lives or achievements affects their self-esteem.
- 70% admitted to using social media before bed, and 70% said it negatively affects sleep quality.
- Over 54% reported feeling mentally exhausted due to continuous engagement.
- Most students did not feel stressed about receiving likes or comments on their posts.
- 32.5% experienced fear of missing out when viewing others' social activities.
- 43.1% try to shift focus to other activities when anxious; fewer take breaks or stop usage completely.

DISCUSSION

According to the study, there is a direct correlation between college students' increasing anxiety and passive social media use. Poor sleep, low self-esteem, and mental exhaustion were linked to the majority of respondents' high daily usage, which frequently involved passive scrolling. Interestingly, the most common cause of worry was information overload, underscoring the cognitive stress brought on by consuming too much stuff.

Signs of digital reliance also surfaced, with many students experiencing anxiety when they were unable to access social media. Negative material and idealized posts increased

emotional stress, but social validation had less of an effect. In order to assist students manage their social media activity more effectively, these findings highlight the necessity of mindful usage methods and mental health support.

LIMITATIONS

It is important to recognize the various limitations of this study. First, the accuracy of responses may be impacted by memory bias or social desirability, as it solely depends on self-reported data. Because there are only 123 college students in the sample, the results cannot be applied to a larger population. Furthermore, because of the cross-sectional methodology, the study is only able to find correlations between social media use and anxiety, not causes. Additionally, a large percentage of neutral answers constrained the breadth of interpretation, potentially hiding more robust viewpoints or trends. Finally, platform-specific behaviors were not examined in the study, which would have provided more thorough insights into the psychological effects of platforms.

CONCLUSIONS

The study's findings indicate a significant relationship between college students' social media usage patterns and their anxiety levels. Passive consumption, such as scrolling without engaging, was more strongly associated with anxious symptoms than active involvement. Contributing factors were social comparison, multimedia overload, FOMO (fear of missing out), and poor sleep from late-night use. While not all students specifically reported feeling nervous, many experienced emotional exhaustion and low self-esteem as a result of their social media use. These results emphasize how important it is to increase awareness of digital well-being and motivate young individuals to utilize social media in a more responsible and health-conscious way.

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